

27.4 Athenian Economy

An important part of life in any community is its economy. An economy is the way in which a community or region organizes the manufacture and exchange of money, food, products, and services to meet people's needs.

Because the land around Athens did not provide enough food for all of the city's people, Athens's economy was based on trade. Athens was near the sea, and it had a good harbor. This enabled Athenians to trade with other city-states and with several foreign lands to **obtain** the goods and natural resources they needed. Athenians acquired wood from Italy and grain from Egypt. In exchange, Athenians traded honey, olive oil, silver, and beautifully painted pottery.

Athenians bought and sold goods at a huge marketplace called the **agora** (A-guh-ruh). There, merchants sold their goods from small stands. Athenians bought lettuce, onions, olive oil, and other foods. Shoppers could also buy household

items such as pottery, furniture, and clay oil lamps. Most people in Athens made their clothes at home, but leather sandals and jewelry were popular items at the market. The agora was also the place where the Athenians bought and sold slaves.

Like most other city-states, Athens developed its own coins to make trade easier. Gold, silver, and bronze were some of the metals used to make coins. Athenians decorated the flat sides of their coins. One such coin had an image of the goddess Athena. The other side of the coin pictured Athena's favorite bird, the owl.

Athenians shopped for food and household goods in the agora. The shopper at right on this vase is inspecting a piece of pottery.

agora a marketplace in ancient Greece



27.5 Education in Athens

Athenian democracy depended on having well-prepared citizens. People in Athens believed that producing good citizens was the main purpose of education. Since only boys could grow up to be citizens, boys and girls were educated quite differently.

Athenians believed that a good citizen should have both an intelligent mind and a healthy body. Therefore, book learning and physical training were important. Boys were taught at home by their mothers or male slaves until the age of 6 or 7. Then, boys went to school until about the age of 14. Teachers taught reading, writing, arithmetic, and literature. Because books were rare and very expensive, students had to read subjects out loud and memorize everything. Writing tablets helped boys learn. To build boys' strength, coaches taught sports such as wrestling and gymnastics. Boys also studied music. They learned to sing and to play the lyre, a stringed instrument like a harp.

At 18, Athenian men began their military training. After their army service, wealthy young men might study with private teachers. These teachers charged high fees for lessons in debating and public speaking that would help young men become future political leaders.

Unlike boys, most girls did not learn to read or write. Instead, girls grew up helping their mothers with household tasks. They were taught to cook, clean, spin thread, and weave cloth. Some also learned ancient secret songs and dances performed for religious festivals. Girls usually married around the age of 15. Those from wealthy families married men chosen by their fathers. Girls from poor families often had more choice.

In addition to reading and writing, Athenian boys studied poetry and music. The stringed instrument near the top of this ancient Greek painting is a lyre.